

Masterwork of the Messiah

Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

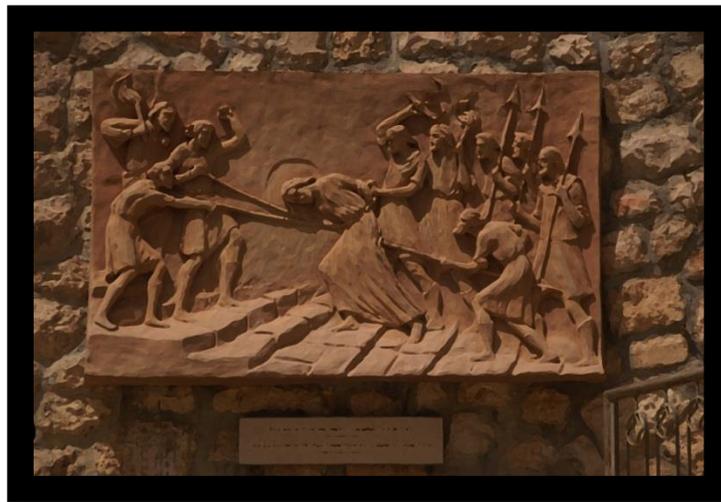
Dealing With Deception

Matthew 26:14-16

Written By

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Mary anointing Jesus' head with costly perfume at a dinner in the home of Simon the Leper in Bethany, some two days before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:6-13), introduced us to a spiritual principle we cannot forget: *Before a great work of God there should be great worship.* Moses understood this premise as he worshipped in God's presence prior the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant. Mary, like Moses, understood this premise as she worshipped Christ in a costly fashion in order to prepare Him for His up and coming crucifixion and death for her sins and our sins. The lingering question is clear: *Are you giving Christ costly worship in anticipation of Him doing a great work in your life and in the life of this local church?* Costly worship primes the pump, as it were, for the spectacular movement of God in relation to sin and sinners.

An equally instructive spiritual principle concerning the work of God in our lives, in our world, and in our church body, is found inscribed on the inspired, weathered parchment of the text which follows the anointing of Jesus. Here in Matthew 26:14-16 we find the narrative turns in a direction we didn't anticipate, in a direction which takes our breath away, in a direction which in some fashion leaves us in utter, jaw-dropping shock. In these three short, concise verses the curtain is pulled back from the infamous, villainous, turn-coat disciple named Judas Iscariot. Instead of standing with Christ at the most critical time of His life, instead of being

loyal to Jesus until the bitter end, this disciple will commit the most egregious, evil, and dastardly deed of all time. He would work against the Lord in order to thwart His messianic mission. From these power-packed verses in Matthew which record this detestable deed we encounter another principle we need to wrap our hearts and minds around, especially as we seek to be Christ's disciples and carry forth His Word and gospel message to an equally oppositional and sin-sick world:

Before A Great Work Of God Is Great Woe (Matthew 26:14-16)

Such is always the case. Where God seeks to move forward with His absolute spiritual truths, to advance His kingdom, to bring spiritual light where there is great, ingrained spiritual darkness, to free people from slavery to sin and give them freedom through the grace of the gospel, to showcase the life-giving and light-giving nature of the eternal Word of God, the Bible, there is always the ramping up of the activity of the ol' Devil, his menacing minions, and his plethora of supporters. Sometimes the opposition is external, and this is easier to deal with because you can stand shoulder to shoulder with others who share your passion for Christ; however, at other times, the opposition is covert, it has stealth written all over it. This kind of internal deceptive woe is the most difficult to combat because it catches you off guard, causing you to possibly lose your spiritual balance.

Such is the sad, sordid story of Judas, the spiritual "receiver" who was really a spiritual deceiver. As the cross loomed on the horizon before Christ, as Christ anticipated doing the most difficult thing a man has ever done, as He contemplated becoming the Passover lamb for the sins of all mankind for all time, is when great spiritual woe broadsided Him. What this passage and the next (Matthew 26:20-35) teach us about the foundation of this attack and Christ's response to it will serve to instruct us as we, too, anticipate doing a great spiritual work for our Lord prior to His return for us.

From my analysis of the short pericope before us, I believe there are three concepts dealing with spiritual woe prior to a great movement of God we need to cognitively understand so we can pragmatically implement in our own cross-bearing as Christ's disciples.

The Woe Can Be Shocking

Matthew's recounting of what occurred sometime after the intimate dinner definitely substantiates the foregoing point:

¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, "What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?" And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. ¹⁶ From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.

The opening phrase "Then one of the twelve," captures your thinking and sets you up to be completely horrified and stupefied by the blatant, deceptive, and un-called for treasonous and treacherous behavior of *a disciple* of all people. "One of the twelve" became a turncoat. "One of the twelve" was a fiendish foe, not a faithful friend. The reality simply sucks the air out of your lungs.

Which disciple defected? Judas Iscariot, the accountant or banker of the group. According to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, his last name could be a Semitic form of sicarius, which denoted a zealous and overly nationalistic group of people committed to the expulsion of Rome from the land of Israel. The discussion about this from the ISBE is most enlightening:

A sicarius is a 'dagger (sica) bearer' or 'assassin.' In Palenstine, during the lifetime of Jesus, the sicarii were extremely zealous jewish nationalists, who carried daggers under their cloaks so that they could take advantage of every opportunity to kill Romans or Roman collaborators. A member of the sicarii would not be completely out of place among the disciples of Jesus. He would have as comrades Simon the Zealot, James and John, sons of thunder who wanted to bid fire come down from heaven and consume the Samaritans (Lk. 9:51-54), and Peter, who had a sword at Gethsemane (Jn. 18:10). Peter is also called Simon Bar-Jonah (Mt. 16:17; Jn. 1:42). Bar-Johan is quite possibly a transliteration of Heb. *biryon* or *baryona*, which means 'outlaw' or 'zealot.'¹

Although the gospel narratives neglect to give us the motive(s) behind his devious, deadly desertion, it did not just originate out of thin air.

From this scrap of lexical, etymological evidence we can possibly surmise that Judas, if he was a *sicarii*, wasn't too excited about the fact that Jesus was looking more and more like a defeatist, potentially dead, useless Messiah to the political cause, than the bold, powerful conquering Davidic king they all wanted. We know this is no far-fetched, baseless observation because the gospels readily ... and sadly ... reveal the political and power aspirations of some of the other disciples (Matthew 18:1-4; Mark 10:37-40; Luke 9:34-46; 22:24). In the spirit of a *sicarii*, Judas, therefore, possibly moved to remove Jesus, so the cause could move forward. He thought wrong because his narcissistic, selfish action stood toe to toe against the cause of God the Father, one devoted solely to the redemption and salvation of sinners by means of the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. Such is the historical and theological irony of the complicated story.

Is this not all most difficult to wrap your mind around? Indeed. Judas had seen and heard it all, spiritually speaking.

- He heard the amazing, bold teaching of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, yet still his heart remained hardened.
- He heard all the parables, yet still his heart remained hardened and daily failed to see his heart was the rock hard soil first soil of the first parable.
- He witnessed most, if not all, of the miracles, from the feeding of the 5,000 to the raising of Lazarus from the dead, yet still his heart remained hardened.
- He watched Christ win every debate with every Pharisaical heavy-weight, yet still his heart remained hardened.
- He lived in the presence of divine love every day, yet still his heart remained hardened.

¹ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2: 1152.

- He had, no doubt, engaged in countless theological discussions with the God of Glory on all those quiet walks to another ministry site, yet still his heart remained hardened.

Despite all this exposure to the things of God in the very presence of God, Judas willfully chose to definitively reject Jesus and to personally work to silence Him. Shocking, isn't it?

Perhaps the portrait of Judas is your portrait at the end of this year of 2014. You, too, have been exposed to the teachings and truth of God, but you chafe against them. You, too, hang around Christ-followers, possibly acting and speaking like one of them, but in your heart of hearts, you have never bowed in trusting faith before the throne of the Savior. You, too, have heard excellent biblical teaching and you've willfully chosen to turn your nose up at it, to snub it, and to reject it as true for yourself, while passing yourself off as a deeply religious person. If this is you, realize at the end of this year, there is divine hope for you. Paul articulates this truth in 1 Timothy 1:15:

¹⁵ It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

Today, my friend, is the day to lay down your mask of hypocrisy and fall, by faith, at the feet of Jesus, the true Christ. Despite the depth of your darkness and broad nature of your wickedness, He stands ready to save even you.

Judas, on the other hand, had no intention of bowing a knee to Jesus. He wanted to hit Jesus at the knees in order to get Him out of the way. And Christ's rebuke of him at the dinner for mentioning how much money was wasted in Mary's anointing, probably served to ignite the final fire of hatred toward the "so-called" Messiah (John "How dare he continue to squander monies in such a fashion, monies which could have been divvied up among us as ardent supporters of His messianic, political claims," could have been his mantra.

Another motivation, which is more clearly defined in the narrative, relates directly to Judas' love of money. When he secretly went to the Chief Priests in Jerusalem, he specifically wanted to know how much they'd give him for turning Christ over to them. And this isn't shocking, but Scripture reminds us that even though he was the banker for the disciples, he had no qualms about embezzling and skimming monies for himself (John 12:2-8). Be careful. The love of money, or unchecked but hidden greed in your life, can move you to doing them most despicable things against the work of God.

How much did Judas settle for? How low would he go in selling Christ out? He took thirty pieces of silver, which amounted to the cost of a slave who had been unfortunately gored by an ox according to Mosaic Law (Exodus 21:32). He sold out the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the great I Am, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, for a measly thirty pieces of silver, the amount of about four months wages at the time.² What a contrast. Mary anointed Jesus with perfume costing a year's salary. What a sacrifice of worship. Judas, conversely, slapped Christ in the face prior to the cross by accepting a paltry thirty pieces of silver for payment for betrayal. What a sordid, sad, and spiritually sick motivation.

² David L. Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008): 621.

But whatever the motivations behind the defection of Judas, none of them gave rational support to his irrational action. And whatever his initial motivations were they were shocking, to say the least.

Such is the way it goes when God is up to something big. Satan works overtime to strike in the most devious way from within to thwart the work of God on the Devil's turf (Ephesians 2:1-3). If you are a military chaplain, and there are many among us, take note. As you seek to stand your godly ground on a host of complex moral and biblical issues, expect shocking opposition. If you are a seminary student at Lancaster Theological Seminary, or Dallas Theological Seminary's new campus in Manassas, expect shocking opposition. If you are a shepherd among us as we teach, preach, and live out the Word of God, expect shocking opposition. If you are preparing for the mission field, expect shocking opposition. If you are a businessperson who loves God and seeks to live by His life-giving principles, expect shocking opposition. If you are a college student desirous of not giving into the lure of the carnal culture, expect shocking opposition. If you are, well, I'll let you fill in the blank. Expect your Adversary to work in the most crafty, covert fashion in order to derail, side-track, or shipwreck your forward movement for the Savior. We'll offer more practical insights toward the end of this study, but for now, keep this opening premise in mind, especially as you face 2105.

And, please, realize I'm speaking about opposition from godless, Christless, gospel-rejecting people, who, at times, have cleverly disguised themselves as sheep, when in all reality they are wolves intend on devouring sheep and the Shepherd. Paul speaks about them in Galatians chapter one, as does Peter in his Second Epistle, and as does Jude in his short letter about false believers.

In addition to this first concept about woe which precedes an amazing work of God, we add another:

The Woe Is Sovereign

The Scripture clearly teach that God is absolutely sovereign. A couple of texts will remind us of this eternal, comforting premise:

² I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted (Job 42).

³ But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases (Psalm 115).

²⁷ For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back? (Isaiah 14).

¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider— God has made the one as well as the other So that man will not discover anything that will be after him (Ecclesiastes 7).

Need I say more? God always has His divinely ordered and lofty purposes and nothing can thwart them from being realized at the divinely appointed time. God's sovereignty is to perfect,

so powerful that He commands and arranges all diverse human actions, be they good or bad, to fulfill His mysterious and good will (Jeremiah 32:41). Nothing is beyond His control. Nothing, not even the betrayal of a close friend, catches Him napping or off-guard. Nothing surprises Him. Nothing leaves Him scrambling for what He should do next to reconnoiter so His purposes can be achieved. No, God's sovereignty, in all things, is perfect, meaning He can and will see His larger, loftier plan for us and for mankind realized in due time. Along these lines, I find the insightful words of Jerry Bridges most helpful and comforting in his book *Trusting God*:

“ ... It is difficult for us to appreciate the reality of God sovereignly doing as he pleases in our lives, because we do not see God doing anything. Instead we see ourselves or other people acting and events occurring, and we evaluate those actions and events according to our own preferences and plans. We see ourselves influencing or perhaps even controlling or being controlled by the actions of other people, but we do not see God at work. But overall the actions and events of our lives, God is in control doing as he pleases -- but apart from those events, or in spite of them, but through them. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery -- a malicious act in and of itself -- but in due time Joseph recognized that through his brothers actions God was acting.”³

Be comforted, especially if you are up against a Judas-type as you seek to walk closely with the Lord Jesus. The Lord is with you and will use the situation, coupled with your faithfulness, to His glory. As the author of Hebrews reminds us:

⁵ Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,” (Hebrews 13).

Take heart, no matter how fierce the fight, no matter how shocking the demonic opposition arrayed against you, you can trust in the fact that God's sovereignty will cause His ultimate and glorious plan to prevail, and while His plan is unfolding, sometimes in the thick of a battle, He will be and is with you. Be comforted, then. I speak from one who has been there and done this. He always brings His peace amidst the spiritual storm, even when that storm has shocked you beyond measure.

All of this talk about the sovereignty of God leads to some additional and logical questions. Naturally, when we look at the biblical fact that Judas fulfilled the ancient prophecy in Zechariah 11:12 that the Messiah would be sold for this amount, we ask, “Did Judas have a free will, or was he just hopelessly doomed to fulfill God's redemptive program?” It's an appropriate yet deep question, but one worth our analysis.

From our perspective, every decision Judas made appears to be made on his own free will. Nowhere in the biblical narrative of this treachery do we read that poor Judas was a puppet of the iron-clad will of God. God didn't push him to go and see the Chief Priests. He went on his own recognizance, his own willful initiative. From Christ's prophecies that the religious leaders will eventually kill Him (Matthew 16:21; 17:9-12 ... by implication) after He is handed over to them (Matthew 17:22-23), and coupled with the fact the Matthew 10:4 tells us beforehand that

³ Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988): 46-47.

Judas would be the traitor, all the story does is build to the moment Judas chose to move from being potentially traitorous to be pragmatically traitorous based on his own sinful and willful choice.

That man has a free-will while God, on the other hand, exercises His elective, predestined will, is clearly articulated throughout Scripture. Hence, regarding our free will, we read in Deuteronomy 30:

¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, ²⁰ by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them” (Deuteronomy 30).

Israel had the free choice, as we do in our day, to either accept or reject God. Judas, likewise, had a free choice to either accept or reject Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

From God’s omniscient, eternal perspective, however, the choice of Judas did not surprise Him at all. If it did, then He, by definition, is not God. How then do we explain this apparent dilemma? I’ll let Dr. Norman Geisler give us some much needed insight:

The answer to this apparent dilemma resides in an understanding of how God predetermines events like these. God is not force them to happen against our free will; rather he predetermines that they will occur through our free will. Or, to put it minimally, God does not have to make these events occur; he can see them occur -- from his eternal vantage point.

A person standing on top of a building foreseen a collision (between two cars that cannot see each other around the corner) does not cause the crash. Likewise, God, you can buy his omniscience perceive what we will freely do, Enoch cause us to do it. And even if he is the ultimate cause of all things, he is not the immediate cause of them. God (the primary cause) produced the fact of freedom, and free agents (secondary causes), by God’s grace, produce the acts of freedom.

Further, one in the same event can be both determined and yet free with no contradiction. For example, when one watches a recording of the televised game, it is already determined; nothing can be changed. It will turn out exactly the same, scoring all, the matter how many times one wonders it. Yet when the game was played, each and every person played according to his or her own free will. No one was forced to do anything. Thus, one and the same events were both determined and yet free.

The God of Orthodox theology is eternal, not temporal. Therefore, he does not really look forward to the future; he simply looks downward on it, since it is present to him and his eternal now (as the great I AM of Ex. 3:14). To illustrate a person in a cave to look out the tunnel and see only one train car going by at a time -- the present one. He cannot see the already past or the one yet to come. But

the person on top of that mountain can see all of them at the same time. Likewise, God can see past, present, and future: his eternal present (the now). He sees the future, not because it is already occurred, but because it preexist in him as the eternal cause of all that was, is, and will be.

If God is eternal, there is no problem with an event being determined in advance (and, thus, not being free), for then God is actively seen in his eternal present what we are freely doing. He is not passively seeing the future (as though he had to wait on it to occur). He is not literally foreseen anything. It is only called foreseen and predetermining from our standpoint in time, not from God's vantage point in eternity.⁴

Judas, therefore, acted according to his free will, while God, from His timeless, omniscient perspective knew the outcome of his free choices. In this regard, then, Judas was no automaton with no way out of the final outcome. His choice to betray Christ was, in fact, his choice and his alone. And his choice was merely used by God, as wicked as it was, to turn the event to accomplish He accomplish God's righteous and holy plan to offer His only Son as the perfect sacrifice for sin and sinners, as prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah 53).

Take comfort, therefore, in God's sovereignty. His will always prevails not matter how fierce the winds of wickedness blow against you. The defection of Judas and the cross, I'm sure, were the Devil's crowing moments with his minions; however, what he failed to anticipate in the divine scheme of things is how God's sovereign power would make sure that the cross would lead not just to the defeat of sin and death, and ultimately Satan and his other-worldly kingdom, but it would triumphantly lead to the crown resting on the pierced brow of the Davidic Messiah, Jesus.

A third and final concept we can glean from this discussion can't be missed and has to be articulated:

The Woe Can Lead To Sagacity

What is sagacity? Good question. According to the New World Dictionary, it is "1. Having or showing keen perception or discernment and sound judgment, foresight, etc. ... [it is] the quality or an instance of being sagacious; penetrating intelligence and sound judgment."⁵ Applied to the story before us, sagacity means we see and learn from spiritual principles which naturally arise from close, careful study.

Several principles come to my mind:

The Lord will test your call and commitment to His cause, His gospel, and His Word with limited times of woe. Been there. Done that. Paul, who been there and done that with Demas (2 Timothy 4:10), Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:20), Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Timothy 1:15), the false brethren behind the false teaching in the Galatian church (Galatians 1), to

⁴ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002): 94-95.

⁵ *New World Dictionary* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980): 1253-1254).

mention a few, gives great insight about how to function in testy times: 2 Timothy 2:1-3 (NASB95)

¹ You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. ³ Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2).

Or in other words: hang in there, don't give up, stay the course.

The Lord will train you in adversity to prepare you for greater adversity and a greater work for Him. You might need to read that one more time. Jeremiah had his share of Judas-types, key people, many of them in religious positions, who rejected his God-ordained mission and word to the failing nation of Israel, opting to embrace false teaching instead. At one point, when Jeremiah smarted from the severity his prophetic mission since he received so much hatred and opposition from the people, he began to complain to God.

¹ Righteous are You, O LORD, that I would plead my case with You; Indeed I would discuss matters of justice with You: Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease? ² You have planted them, they have also taken root; they grow, they have even produced fruit. You are near to their lips but far from their mind. ³ But You know me, O LORD; You see me; and You examine my heart's attitude toward You. Drag them off like sheep for the slaughter and set them apart for a day of carnage! ⁴ How long is the land to mourn and the vegetation of the countryside to wither? For the wickedness of those who dwell in it, Animals and birds have been snatched away, because men have said, "He will not see our latter ending."

I shall never forget the Lord's word to the waffling prophet:

⁵ "If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses? If you fall down in a land of peace, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? ⁶ "For even your brothers and the household of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you, even they have cried aloud after you. Do not believe them, although they may say nice things to you" (Jeremiah 12).